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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 4307
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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STATE FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A, SCA/PPD, S/CRS, S/CT,
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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: AFGHANS WARN SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
GATES AGAINST ARMING TRIBES AGAINST THE TALIBAN

1) SUMMARY: Afghan editorialists cited recent regional history in urging U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to reject a reported plan to arm Afghan tribes in the border areas with Pakistan. Media reports from SECDEF's visit to Afghanistan on Dec. 3-5 included suggestions by a "Defense official" that Gates was considering this based on the success of a similar effort in Al-Anbar, Iraq. Afghan commentators reacted to these reports with consternation and dismay, arguing that such actions had already failed in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and would only increase instability. END SUMMARY.

2) An unsigned editorial in independent daily Hasht-e-Sobh entitled "Deal with Tribal Elders: U.S.'s Double Standard Policy in Afghanistan," stated that, "U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates is in Kabul to assess the affects of Pakistan's transition on the southeastern regions of Afghanistan. Also to assess the possibility of an agreement with the tribal elders, based upon the U.S.'s experience in Iraq. The U.S. is concerned with rising insecurity in the country and is seeking political solutions for the problem, possibly through arming the tribes and providing financial support to them. It is also said that the Canadian forces are providing money to tribal elders in the southern province of Kandahar.

If this new policy is implemented, it will raise major concerns among the people, because those tribal elders will still support the Taliban even after receiving a big amount of money. This was the case with the tribal elders of the Waziristan region in Pakistan, where the tribes supported the Taliban even after receiving big amounts of money from the government. Now the government is in active combat with those tribes and the Taliban.

The Taliban are stronger than the tribal elders and they have been able to threaten and even kill some of the elders who intended to support the government. Strengthening the tribes in the south will result in subverting the government for long periods of time and paving the path for the Taliban to achieve their goals very easily.

3) In an unsigned editorial the influential independent Kabul Weekly entitled "The U.S. Military and the Need to Treat the Wound called 'The Pakistani tribes,'" wrote, "The [issue] which was discussed during Mr. Gates' visit to Afghanistan was the arming of southern

tribes by the U.S. to fight the Taliban. The U.S. must be very careful in this issue. The U.S. provided Gulbuddin Hekmatyar with financial support and weapons during the jihad against the Soviets, and after a short time he stood against the U.S. and supported Saddam Hussain during the first Gulf War. He is still using the remainder of that money and those weapons to fight against the U.S. and the Afghan government.

If the U.S. provides the Afghan tribes with weapons and money there is no guarantee that now or later they will not be used against them. On the other hand, if the tribes in the southern regions are armed, the tribes in the north and central regions will not feel safe and will lose their trust in U.S. forces. Therefore the U.S. should try to treat the sickness called the Taliban by choosing the Afghan National Security Forces and by supporting them."

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